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Whistle Stops and Campaign Steam

Down the Middle of the Road

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By Erwin D. Canham

In five weeks the American people will select their next President. It's going to be a rugged five weeks, from all the signs.

President Truman is on the road, with a sharp personal attack on General Eisenhower. He claims the general gave bad advice about the Russians when he was commander in Europe. The Republicans, on the other hand, are trying to make political capital of such things as General Bedell Smith's statement that he assumes Communists have infiltrated all branches of the American Government.

It is easy to make the general's statement a sensational admission. In fact, he was saying the obvious: that we face a clever enemy, who will certainly have tried to infiltrate every part of the government, and may have done so in some cases. At least, as the general said, we have to assume he has done so.

This is a far different statement than to say that the charges of Communists in government are a red herring. But it is also far different from indiscriminate—but unproved—charges against the loyalty of large numbers of Americans.

Out in Springfield, Illinois, Governor Stevenson also tried to turn the Bedell Smith statement to his political advantage. He pointed out that the job of detecting and catching Communists in American government is chiefly in the hands of three men: J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, General Bedell Smith, himself, who was General Eisenhower's deputy during the war, and the latter's assistant, Allan Dulles, brother of John Foster Dulles, the Republican foreign policy adviser. So, concluded Governor Stevenson, the job of fighting Communist penetration is one for our security agencies and is in good hands.

He said: "A highly professional, nonpolitical intelligence agency is indispensable to the government, whether a Republican or a Democrat is President. It must never become a political football. To exploit General Smith's first statement for partisan purposes is the kind of political opportunism which will never catch Communists."

This cool kind of analysis is typical of Governor Stevenson's campaign. It is very different from the hot oratory flowing from the rear of the Truman train out in the western plains and mountains. The contrast between the President and Governor Stevenson is so great as to arouse public questions as to inconsistency.

All this leaves General Eisenhower with little choice except to give his own hatchet men full rein. In Columbia, South Carolina, himself, he was angling for the solid

south. He attacked the Truman regime as a scandal-a-day administration while the President was urging voters to send the general—in his words—"back to the Army where he belongs."

This is the kind of rough slugging that doesn't illuminate the issues of the campaign. The President, for instance, said General Eisenhower's testimony on the friendly disposition of Russia, in 1945, carried great weight and did a great deal of harm. The obvious answer is to ask why—if Mr. Truman knew this—he didn't get rid of General Eisenhower at the time.

The fact, of course, is that the truth, as usual, lies somewhere in between the two extremes of campaign oratory. The Republicans have some effective issues: corruption in government, the natural desire of people for a change—for rotation in office—their concern about communism in government, the impact of inflation, the war in Korea. But it is not easy to make the case for these important issues in the face of the withering fire of the Democratic extremists without pressing the case too far.

Governor Stevenson cannot expect General Eisenhower to be sweetly reasonable while President Truman is out burning up the hustings. Unfortunately, political campaigns are not conducted in fine shadings, but in stark blacks and whites. Furthermore, General Eisenhower—a nonpolitical drafted for his candidate job—is struggling against two very expert professionals.

Nevertheless, after last week's intense flurry about the Nixon fund, after the income statements of the Democratic nominees, it is quite apparent that the Republicans are holding their own and may have been gaining. Certainly the Nixon matter was a net political advantage for the Republicans even if there are still a number of citizens who are disturbed about this kind of fund.

Incidentally, the distinguished historian, Dr. Claude M. Fuess, grabbed me at lunch and advised me to look, in volume two of his life of Daniel Webster, There, sure enough, is the story of the raising of a similar fund for Webster by New York and Boston businessmen. Indeed, the whole history of Daniel Webster's private financial affairs could not stand the scrutiny being devoted today to the Nixon, Sparkman, Stevenson, or Eisenhower, exchequers.

In 1851, for example, forty men in New York subscribed five hundred dollars apiece to give Webster some compensation for his pecuniary sacrifices. This was done before Webster was able to resume his post as Secretary of State. At an earlier period, when the issue of the Bank of the United States was the burning political question of the day, Webster as well as Henry Clay

accepted retainers and fees from the Bank.

Perhaps this proves that ethical standards are actually rising today—at least over a century ago. And perhaps we can hope that out of the present revelations of personal affairs will come higher principles and standards of public life.

A remarkable conference is opening in Red China. It is a so-called Asia Peace Conference. Delegates, all of whom are Communists or close fellow-travelers, will attend from 32 countries. Heavy streams of hate-American propaganda may be expected. Germ warfare charges will get the full treatment. Efforts to arouse continental Asia against the rearmament of Japan will be heard.

Japan is holding its first election subsequent to the end of the allied occupation. It is its first real test of the operation of elective democracy. In one respect, Japan will almost certainly have a big advantage over the United States. It is expected that up to 75 per cent of the registered voters will actually cast their ballots.

Why can't we do as well? After the kind of campaigning we expect for the next five weeks, after the penetration of radio and television and whistle-stopping tactics, it will be a national disgrace if we don't get out as many voters as the Japanese do. Shame, at least, ought to bring us to do so, for nearly every free-voting country in the world does a lot better than we do.

One more striking sign of the times is reported from Berlin. A record number of East German policemen have sought political asylum in West Germany this month. No less than 366 have made their way across the line, hoping for freedom. That's a lot of policemen.

Last month, 230 Communist police came over. About 2,000 police in all and 70,000 civilians have fled to West Berlin thus far this year. They impose a heavy burden on West Berlin's economy. But they are one of the most striking proofs—along with the Chinese and Korean prisoners who don't want to be repatriated—of the real score in the world.